Introduction to Municipal Accreditation

SAFETY CODES COUNCIL

Alberta
MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

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Alberta's Safety System

The safety system

Alberta Municipal Affairs and the Safety Codes Council work in partnership with Alberta municipalities, corporations and other organizations to provide an effective, accountable and affordable safety system. These partnerships are crucial in delivering safety codes and standards that meet the evolving needs of the province's safety system. The *Safety Codes Act* is the key legislation for Alberta's safety system. The *Act* enables stakeholders to share in the administration and delivery of permit and inspection services throughout Alberta.

Accreditation

Under the *Safety Codes Act*, municipalities and organizations can become accredited to deliver safety services in their jurisdictions. This means they are delegated the responsibility to issue permits and inspect all work performed in their jurisdiction in the disciplines in which they are accredited. Accreditation is available for six disciplines — building, fire, electrical, plumbing, gas and private sewage disposal systems.

The value of accreditation

The *Safety Codes Act* encourages safety services to be delivered at the local level, and it provides for a compliance monitoring system through the voluntary accreditation of municipalities, corporations, agencies, and Regional Services Commissions. Accreditation allows a municipality to be directly involved with the delivery of safety services and to address the particular safety concerns of its community quickly and efficiently.

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Why Become Accredited?

Consistency

Since 1994, the *Safety Codes Act* and the Safety System have encouraged the administration and delivery of safety services at the local level. Municipal accreditation supports local service delivery and allows municipalities to establish permitting and compliance monitoring services that are consistent with the needs of the community as well as with the *Safety Codes Act*.

Convenience

The delivery of services at the local level provides local access and the convenience of "one-stop shopping" for users of the safety system. The administrators of the system have the opportunity to set permit fees, establish compliance monitoring systems and effectively deliver the services in the way that is right for the community.

Providing a voice for municipalities

Accreditation allows a community to have a say in the safety system as it affects the people who live there. Accreditation through jointly accredited municipalities and Regional Services Commissions also allows communities that may be too small to administer a viable safety services program to participate as part of a team delivering safety services in their communities.

The municipality can determine the types and levels of services it wishes to provide within the framework established by the Safety Codes Council. It may also determine the fees it will charge for permits and inspection services. The municipality can choose to provide services through its own staff, an accredited agency or a combination of both. If an agency is used, it must comply with the Quality Management Plan or plans of the municipality or municipalities.

Accreditation Choices

Municipalities have four choices regarding the delivery of safety services:

- not to participate (non-accredited);
- to be accredited on their own;
- to be accredited jointly with other municipalities; or
- to participate through a Regional Services Commission.

Non-Accredited Municipalities

In non-accredited municipalities or where a municipality is not accredited in certain safety disciplines, the province is responsible for administration of the *Safety Codes Act.*

Compliance-monitoring services in non-accredited municipalities are provided through a contractual arrangement between accredited inspection agencies and the province.

There are disadvantages to remaining a non-accredited municipality including:

- Not being involved in decisions concerning service delivery and application of the *Safety Codes Act.*
- Having limited access to information regarding development and construction within their jurisdictions.
- Not being able to establish level of service and related fees.

Accreditation Choices

Accredited Municipalities

Accredited municipalities are responsible for the administration of the *Safety Codes Act* within their jurisdiction (geographical boundary) for the specific disciplines in which they acquire accreditation.

Accredited Municipalities either hire their own staff, form a contractual agreement with an accredited agency to contract safety services work or adopt a combination of both processes.

There are advantages to becoming an accredited municipality including:

- Having local control and accountability over the jurisdiction's safety system.
- Being able to establish permit fees appropriate for constituents.
- Streamlining provisions of planning, development, bylaw enforcement and tax assessment services with safety services.

Accreditation Choices

Jointly Accredited Municipalities

Joint accreditation service delivery is found primarily in rural areas, generally with one larger central community (municipal jurisdiction) and several smaller municipalities combining resources for the mutual administration of the *Safety Codes Act*.

Jointly Accredited Municipalities can either hire their own staff, form a contractual agreement with an accredited agency to contract safety services work or adopt a combination of both processes.

There are advantages to joint accreditation including:

- Inter-municipal alliances of Jointly Accredited Municipalities enhance and simplify the administration and delivery of safety services for constituents.
- Smaller municipalities are allowed to play an active role in applying provisions of the *Safety Codes Act*.
- Local control and accountability is maintained over the safety system within a combined geographical boundary.
- Permit fees can be established at levels appropriate for constituents.
- Provisions of planning, development, bylaw enforcement and tax assessment services with safety services can be streamlined.

Accreditation Choices

Accredited Regional Services Commissions

Regional Services Commissions are established under the *Municipal Government Act*. They are non-profit corporations governed by a board of directors and formed by two or more municipalities to provide any utility or other service they are authorized for. Regional Services Commissions have their own distinct status separate from municipalities. They can hire staff, administer payrolls, own property and raise capital.

Regional Services Commissions established under the *Municipal Government Act* may apply for accreditation to administer the *Safety Codes Act* within the boundaries of their member municipalities.

Accredited Regional Services Commissions can deliver services either directly through their staff, form a contractual agreement with an accredited agency, or adopt a combination of both processes.

A Regional Services Commission can provide services outside the boundaries of its member municipalities. To do this, the commission must become an accredited agency and enter into service delivery contracts with accredited municipalities, accredited corporations or the Government of Alberta.

There are advantages to obtaining accreditation as a Regional Services Commission including:

- Enhanced and simplified administration and delivery of safety services for constituents.
- An active role for smaller municipalities in applying provisions of the *Safety Codes Act*.
- Input for member municipalities into the quality of safety services delivery in their region through direct representation on the commission's board of directors.
- Appropriate permit fees established for constituents.
- Streamlined provisions of planning, development, bylaw enforcement and tax assessment services with safety services.
- A say for all member municipalities in the governance of the commission.

How to Become Accredited

For Municipal Accreditation a municipality:

- completes an application form to provide information about the organization as well as the safety disciplines and parts of the *Act* the organization wishes to be accredited to administer.

- develops and submits a Quality Management Plan that documents the way the municipality intends to administer responsibilities delegated to it under the *Safety Codes Act*. The Safety Codes Council has developed a model Uniform Quality Management Plan that all municipalities are encouraged to follow.

When accepted by the Safety Codes Council, the municipality is formally accredited to provide safety services in conformance with the appropriate codes and standards under the *Safety Codes Act* and its regulations.

For Joint Accreditation:

- each municipality completes an application form to provide information about the organization as well as the safety disciplines and parts of the *Act* the organization wishes to be accredited to administer.

- each municipality submits a separate Quality Management Plan to the Safety Codes Council for each of the disciplines in which they wish to provide services.

When accepted by the Safety Codes Council, the municipalities are jointly accredited to provide services in accordance with their Quality Management Plan.

For Regional Services Commissions Accreditation:

The process for establishing a Regional Services Commission is generally initiated by a request to the Minister of Municipal Affairs from a lead municipality on behalf of the municipalities that will make up the commission.
The commission is then established by the Lieutenant Governor through an Order in Council. The order specifies the name of the commission, the member municipalities and the services it is authorized to provide.

Following establishment by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, by Ministerial Order, establishes the first Board of Directors, fixes their term of office and appoints the first chairman.

Support for Accredited Municipalities

The management and administration of the system is conducted primarily by two organizations: Alberta Municipal Affairs and the Safety Codes Council. Although each has its own set of roles and responsibilities, both organizations are partners in ensuring that the safety system operates efficiently for all Albertans.

Municipal Support Program

The Safety Codes Council monitors accredited municipalities and provides mentoring to encourage continuous improvement.

Municipal Affairs staff provides monitoring review services on behalf of the Safety Codes Council. The accredited municipality is given detailed results of the review and a description of any areas requiring improvement. Where improvement is required, Alberta Municipal Affairs staff provides mentoring and assistance.

Uniform Quality Management Plan

A Quality Management Plan documents the manner in which an organization intends to carry out the responsibilities delegated to it under the *Safety Codes Act*. If an accredited municipality uses the services of an accredited agency, the agency must comply with the Quality Management Plan of the municipality or commission. The Safety Codes Council has developed a Uniform Quality Management Plan that all municipalities are encouraged to follow.

Electronic Permit System

The electronic permit system has been developed to provide data management for permit applications, permit approvals and compliance monitoring based upon the principles of the Uniform Quality Management Plan. The system also includes data management for development permits and provides data transfer from recorded development activities related to tax assessment.

The system has been initially configured, based on stakeholder input, to include five Safety Codes permit types (Building, Plumbing, Gas, Electrical and Private Sewage Disposal Systems) as well as a Development Permit that complies with the requirements of the *Municipal Government Act* and links with the system that municipalities utilize for their property and assessment information. With this basic structure, municipalities are able to address land management activities from development to occupancy.

Financial Assistance and Support to create new Regional Services Commissions

A newly accredited Regional Services Commission may apply to Alberta Municipal Affairs for a grant for start-up costs (normally in the order of $5,000 to $10,000).

Appendix 1—Legislative Framework

The *Safety Codes Act* sets out the codes and standards and allows for permit systems in the specific discipline that an accredited entity intends to administer.

Safety Codes Act

The *Safety Codes Act* provides a framework for the delivery of a comprehensive safety system for the design, construction, operation and maintenance of buildings and equipment in a variety of disciplines.

The *Safety Codes Act* allows for:

- Development of standards by industry stakeholders through the Safety Codes Council that are recommended for adoption by the Government of Alberta.
- A process to accredit organizations so they can assume responsibility for the implementation and administration of the *Safety Codes Act* for various disciplines.
- Implementation of certification and designation processes to establish the competency of Safety Codes Officers to administer the *Act* and authorize them to function within the framework of an accredited organization.
- Appeals of decisions made about accreditation, certification and designation, as well as technical decisions made by Safety Codes Officers.

Appendix 2—Administering the *Safety Codes Act*

There are two basic components to the successful operations of any effective model for the administration and delivery of safety standards and inspection services in any region of the province.

Administration

Under the Quality Management Plan (QMP), accredited municipalities, jointly accredited municipalities and accredited Regional Services Commissions are responsible for the effective day-to-day operations of their safety system. This includes paperwork, handling of permits, records filing, and acting as liaison between other parties such as the customer, the accountability body and the service providers. Administration also oversees the flow of revenues and expenses between different bodies and the management of any contractual agreements with service providers.

Service Delivery

The accredited municipality provides services in accordance with performance criteria that are set out in a QMP established with the Safety Codes Council. Among other things, the QMP sets the type and frequency of inspection that will be done.

Appendix 3—Contact Information

For additional information on the *Safety Codes Act*, contact Alberta Municipal Affairs, Safety Services Branch or the Safety Codes Council:

Safety Services Branch
Public Safety Division
Alberta Municipal Affairs
16th Floor, Commerce Place
10155 - 102 Street
Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 4L4
Phone: (780) 427-8256
For toll-free access outside of Edmonton, call 310-0000
Fax: (780) 427-8686
E-mail: ***safety.services@gov.ab.ca***
Website: ***www.gov.ab.ca/ma***

Safety Codes Council
800, 10707-100 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 3M1
Phone: (780) 413-0099
Toll Free Phone: 1-888-413-0099
Fax: (780) 424-5134
Toll Free Fax: 1-888-424-5134
Website: ***www.safetycodes.ab.ca***

For additional information on Regional Services Commissions, contact Alberta Municipal Affairs, Local Government Services:

Municipal Services Branch
Local Government Services Division
Alberta Municipal Affairs
17th Floor, Commerce Place
10155 - 102 Street
Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 4L4
Phone: (780) 427-2225
For toll-free access outside of Edmonton, call 310-0000
Fax: (780) 420-1016
E-mail: ***lgsmail@gov.ab.ca***
Website: ***www.gov.ab.ca/ma***

For additional information on the electronic permit system, contact the Safety Codes Council:

Safety Codes Council
800, 10707-100 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 3M1
Phone: (780) 413-0099
Toll free: 1-888-413-0099
Fax: (780) 424-5134
Toll free: 1-888-424-5134
Website: ***www.safetycodes.ab.ca***